DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 411 610 EA 028 661

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TITLE	Kids and School Reform.
ISBN	ISBN-0-7879-1065-1
PUB DATE	1997-00-00
NOTE	254p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Jossey-Bass, Inc., Publishers, 350 Sansome Street, San Francisco, CA 92104 ($28.95; quantity discount; phone: 1-800-956-7739; Web address: http://www.josseybass.com).
PUB TYPE	Books (010) -- Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	Document Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Educational Environment; Educational Objectives; High Schools; *School Restructuring; *Student Attitudes; Student Centered Curriculum; *Student Motivation
IDENTIFIERS	*Coalition of Essential Schools

ABSTRACT

Many studies of school restructuring during the 1980s profiled teachers and administrators; however, little research examined the students who attended schools undergoing change. This book spotlights students in five high schools that participated in the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) reform network. The CES is a school-reform partnership between Brown University (Rhode Island) and over 1,000 schools around the United States. Coalition schools share a common goal: they hope to redesign their practices using the Nine Common Principles to increase students' capabilities. The principles advocate a trimmer curriculum, lower student-teacher ratios, less teacher talk, and new authentic assessments. Chapter 1 introduces the six students, sophomores who differed in personality, economic and personal circumstances, and academic achievement. Chapters 2 through 5 discuss four sets of connections that seemed critical to making genuine differences in students' performance. The findings indicate that students do best in school when the following sets of interactive connections occur: variety balanced by routine, high expectations nurtured by personal attention, curriculum that is both rigorous and innovative, and a school community small enough to engage everyone in lively discourse. Chapter 6 examines four kinds of commitments central to the development and maintenance of the connections--a commitment to ideas, to bias-free schools, to teacher growth, and to evidence of student gains. An index and chapter notes are included. Appendices contain the Nine Common Principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools, methodological notes, and information on the five high schools. (Contains 66 references). (LMI)

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